

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4819

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 4358

LIMDIS

EO 11652: XGDS1

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: REACTION OF MILITARY OFFICER TO PRESIDENT THIEU'S
APRIL 4 SPEECH

REF: SAIGON 4342

1. DEPARTMENT MAY FIND OF INTEREST THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS MADE TO MINISTER OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS BENNETT BY COLONEL DUONG HIEU NGHIA, ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THE GVN DELEGATION TO THE TPJMC AND FORMER PROVINCE CHIEF OF VINH LONG, ON PRESIDENT THIEU'S APRIL 4 SPEECH. NGHIA IS A HIGHLY REGARDED ARMY OFFICER, WHO, THOUGH LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT, IS MODERATELY CRITICAL OF SOME GVN POLICIES.

2. MORNING OF APRIL 5, COLONEL NGHIA TOLD BENNETT AT BREAKFAST THAT HE THOUGH PRESIDENT THIEU'S SPEECH THE PREVIOUS NIGHT WAS A GOOD ONE AND THAT THE PEOPLE LIKED IT. THE PRESIDENT HAD TOLD THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANTED TO KNOW AND BY SHOWING HIMSELF ON TV HAD DEMONSTRATED IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY THAT HE WAS STILL IN SAIGON AND STILL ON THE JOB. NGHIA ALSO REMARKED THAT THE PRESIDENT LOOKED MUCH BETTER THAN IN HIS PREVIOUS SPEECH AND HAD SPOKEN WITH ANIMATION--ALL OF WHICH WAS A GOOD SIGN. IN GENERAL, NGHIA THOUGHT THAT THE SPEECH WAS A GOOD FIRST STEP TO CALM THE PEOPLE AND PREPARE FOR THE FIGHTING WHICH EVERYONE KNEW HAD TO COME.

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3. IN PARTICULAR, NGHIA SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT'S EXPLANATION OF THE

WITHDRAWAL FROM KONTUM AND PLEIKU WAS CLEAR AND PERSUASIVE. THE FACTS WERE TRUE AND WERE FRANKLY PRESENTED. HE SAID FROM WHAT KNOWLEDGE HE HAD OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED, THIEU'S DESCRIPTION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROBLEM IN MR 1 WAS ALSO ACCURATE. CONCERNING THE SITUATION WHICH DEVELOPED IN MR 2, NGHIA HAD NO GOOD WORDS FOR GENERAL

PHU'S PERFORMANCE. HE SAID THAT PHU HAD LEFT PLEIKU BY HIMSELF, LEAVING NO INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS STAFF. NO WONDER CHAOS DEVELOPED. LATER, PHU HAD LEFT NHA TRANG IN HASTE, LEAVING NO INSTRUCTIONS, AND AGAIN THERE WAS A DEBACLE.

4. REGARDING THE POLITICAL PART OF THE SPEECH, NGHIA, WHOSE POLITICAL SYMPATHIES ARE WITH THE PROGRESSIVE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT, THOUGHT THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER KHIEM AND HIS CABINET WOULD BE WELCOMED BY THE PEOPLE. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT HAVE ANY CONFIDENCE THAT SPEAKER CAN WOULD BE ABLE TO FUNCTION WELL AS PRIME MINISTER. CAN, HE SAID, HAD NOT EVEN BEEN A PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE DEPUTY PROVINCE CHIEF. NEVERTHELESS HE THOUGHT CAN WAS AN ACCEPTABLE "TRANSITIONAL" PRIME MINISTER.

5. IN NGHIA'S OPINION THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE A "POLITICIAN". HE WENT DOWN THE LIST OF POSSIBILITIES, JUDGING THEM AS FOLLOWS: (1) TRAN QUOC BUU--TOO "OLD"; (2) PROFESSOR HUY--NOT EXPERIENCED ENOUGH; (3) TRAN VAN LAM--TOO MUCH OF A BUSINESSMAN AND TOO PRO-FRENCH; (4) DR. TRAN VAN DO--A FINE MAN, HIGHLY RESPECTED, BORN IN THE SOUTH BUT ONCE RESIDENT IN THE NORTH, FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER, ALTOGETHER A FINE CANDIDATE, ALTHOUGH A LITTLE OLD. NGHIA THOUGHT THAT SENATOR VU VAN MAU WAS HOPELESS AND SAID THE SAME OF DEPUTY TRAN VAN TUYEN. HE MADE NO COMMENT ABOUT NGUYEN CAO KY. NGHIA, WHO IS A BUDDHIST HIMSELF, SAID HE COULD NOT SEE ANY BUDDHIST POLITICAL LEADER ON THE HORIZON. MARTIN

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